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Who Should Direct the CIA?

John Horton's piece [op-ed, Jan. 2] is a welcome antidote to the self-satisfaction of Bob Gates' Panglossian presentation, "Is the CIA's Analysis Any Good?" [op-ed, Dec. 12], on the matter of whether policy pressures influence intelligence estimates. However, as a former CIA analyst with 29 years' experience who has served on the National Intelligence Council, I believe that Mr. Horton's useful suggestion of a council of elders to negotiate the clashes between policy and intelligence does not go far enough. Something institutional is also needed.

The hard but inescapable fact is that the director of Central Intelligence has to be an independent-minded cuss who is willing to deliver straight judgments without shrinking from the costs. And they can be severe: anger and scorn from policy-makers offended by uncongenial views, threats of exclusion from the "inner circle" and the seductive argument that, if one is not a "team player," one cannot be effective at all.

A good director has to accept the fact that the job is likely to be his last appointment. Quite a few

have managed to behave this way. Mr. Horton cites one who found himself considered a "traitor" because of the CIA's gloomy Vietnam analyses. Richard Helms (and his deputy Vernon Walters, Richard Nixon's darling) rejected attempts to make the agency a scapegoat for Watergate. Stan Turner withstood pressure from Carter's White House to overstate our abilities to monitor SALT II in the ratification debates.

This tradition was fractured by the appointment of George Bush. I found Mr. Bush, as did many others at CIA, to be a first-class director who backed up his experts' views and made sure they got heard in high places. But Mr. Bush had been chairman of the Republican National Committee, a most partisan job. From there it has proven, sadly, but a short step to Bill Casey, manager of Reagan's 1980 campaign.

Would it exceed legislative ingenuity to write a bill requiring that the director of Central Intelligence be either an intelligence professional or an outsider of proven stature and political independence?

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